



## News letter Volume 1 No. 1 Fall 2019

**T**his newsletter is a collaborative effort by the directors and members of the Western Naval History Association. Its purpose is to promote membership, provide content, and share news of our activities and efforts. It is very much a work in process and we solicit suggestions and/or contributions to future editions.

In this issue the big news is the 2020 Symposium. There are general notices and information regarding recent histories published about the Great War at sea. Our Secretary, Steve McLaughlin has shared a brief narrative regarding an action fought between Sweden and Russia

written for member Lonnie Gill to supplement a wargame he is designing that deals with the Russian Navy in the Age of Sail. Their efforts are an example of the type of collaboration the WNHA was founded to encourage. It's a spin-off of giving like-minded people a venue to rub shoulders.



Classroom, University of USS Midway on board *Midway*, site of WNHA 2020 Symposium: Expanding Naval History II

## ANNOUNCING

The WHNA Board will meet on Saturday, 21 September from 1 pm to 3 pm. at Fairouz Café:3166 Midway Drive, San Diego. This is open to all members.

We'll be talking about the 2020 symposium and anything else that comes up. Our last meeting was also held at Fairouz and it proved a comfortable venue for our purposes. Please contact Vince O'Hara to confirm your attendance, or with any questions.

[vohara@gmail.com](mailto:vohara@gmail.com) or [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net)

## ANNOUNCING

**T**he directors are pleased that so many excellent people are coming to share their experience and time in San Diego next year. Richard B. Frank will be the 2020 WNHA keynote speaker. He is the noted author of *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (1990) and *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999) and *MacArthur* (2007). A major work on the Pacific war is forthcoming.



## WNHA 2020 SYMPOSIUM

### Expanding Naval History II

**Saturday, 29 Feb. & Sunday, 1 Mar. 2020.**  
**USS Midway Museum**  
**910 North Harbor Dr. San Diego, CA 92101**

Museum admission included for symposium attendees.

### Speakers and Activities

**Keynote Speaker: Richard B. Frank**

**Dr. Bernard Cole**, National War College.

**Mark Fiorey**, Deputy Director, Hattendorf Historical Center. "U.S. Navy and Operation Passage to Freedom during the partition of Vietnam, 1954-55."

**James Hornfischer**, (invited), *Neptune's Inferno*

**Charles MacVean**, Captain USN (ret). "Recollections of a Cold War sub skipper."

**Stephen McLaughlin**, *Russian and Soviet Battleships*. "Russian SIGNIT in World War I"

**Dr. David J. Ulbrich**, Norwich University. "USMC & the dawn of amphibious operations."

**Dr. Sam Tangredi**, Naval War College.

**Dr. Dorothy Watson**, National War College. "How History Vivifies Joint Professional Military Education".

**Michael Whitby**, Senior Naval Historian, Canadian Department of National Defence. "Cold War submarine intelligence operations."

### Roundtables

**Topics in Cold War Naval History (tentative)**  
Rear Admiral Michael McDevitt (USN Ret)  
Michael Whitby, Sam Tangredi, Bernard Cole.

### Workshops

**Lonnie Gill**, General Quarters. "Naval Wargaming"

**Richard Russell**, Director of the Naval Institute Press: "Writing for Naval Institute"

**Vince O'Hara**, *Six Victories*, "Making maps for publication."

**Richard Stein**, *Battleship Holiday*. "Photography to illustrate books and articles."

**Karl Zingheim**, USS *Midway*. "Dioramas/modeling."

### How to Attend the 2020 Symposium

Join the Western Naval Historical Association by contacting us. Membership is \$50 year and includes admission to the annual symposium.

Students may join for \$30

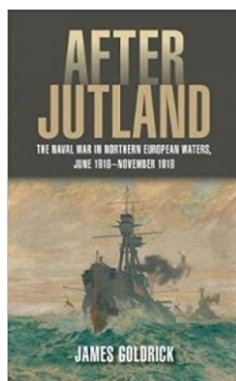
Please contact the WNHA at [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net) or send a check for \$50 to Vince O'Hara  
631 East J St. Chula Vista, CA. 91910  
Please include name, address, email, and telephone. **ATTENDANCE IS LIMITED**

## Recent Books on World War I at Sea

**Dodson, Aidan.** *German Battleship Helgoland Detailed in the Original Builders' Plans.* Barnsley, England: Seaforth Publishing, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-52674-759-4. \$48.95. The latest in a series of books that use the contemporary builder's drawings to illustrate the external and internal features of warships. The drawings are beautiful examples of the draftsman's art.

**Friedman, Norman.** *British Submarines in Two World Wars.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-68247-440-2. \$85.00. The most recent book from American naval analyst and historian Norman Friedman.

**Goldrick, James.** *After Jutland: The Naval War in Northern European Waters, June 1916–November 1918.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-68247-327-6. \$39.95. PB. The keynote speaker from our 2019 symposium, Rear-Admiral James Goldrick, RAN (ret.) details naval action in the North Sea and the Baltic after the Battle of Jutland (31 May 1916).



**Jellicoe, Nicholas.** *The Last Days of the High Seas Fleet: From Mutiny to Scapa Flow.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-52675-459-5. \$39.95. The grandson of the famous admiral follows up his book on Jutland with a treatment of the Imperial German Navy in the last months of the First World War and its defiant scuttling at Scapa Flow in 1919.

**Jordan, John and Philippe Caresse.** *French Battleships of World War One.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-59114-639-1. \$75.00. This book is a delight for anyone interested in the technical aspects of warships, detailing all of the French predreadnoughts and dreadnoughts that participated in the war. It also provides extensive information on the operational histories of these ships.

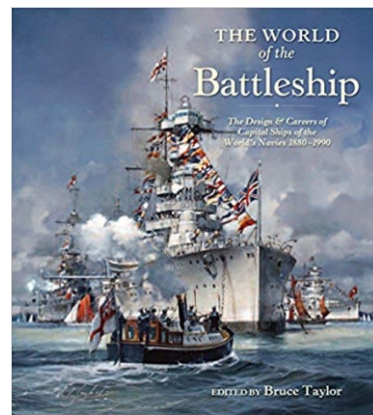
**McCartney, Innes.** *Scapa 1919: The Archaeology of a Scuttled Fleet.* Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-47282-890-3. \$40.00. McCartney, who previously examined the ships sunk at the Battle of Jutland, turns his attention to the bottom of Scapa Flow.

**Olson, Wes.** *The Last Cruise of a German Raider: The Destruction of SMS Emden.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-68247-373-3. \$39.95. Using German, British and Australian archives, the author recounts the famous cruise of the German cruiser *Emden*, and describes in detail her destruction by HMAS *Sydney*.

**Seligmann, Matthew.** *Rum, Sodomy, Prayers, and the Lash Revisited: Winston Churchill and Social Reform in the Royal Navy, 1900–1915.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-19875-997-3. \$78.00. Seligmann looks at social reform in the Royal Navy in the years leading up to the First World War.

**Sondhaus, Lawrence.** *German Submarine Warfare in World War I: The Onset of Total War at Sea.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-44226-954-5. \$38.00. The well known expert on the German and Austro-Hungarian navies describes the twists and turns in German submarine warfare in World War I, and examines why it ultimately failed.

**Taylor, Bruce,** editor. *The World of the Battleship: The Lives and Careers of Twenty-One Capital Ships from the World's Navies 1880–1990.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-87021-906-1. \$76.95. A big beautifully illustrated book that looks at the history of battleships and the navies that possessed them by describing the careers of 21 ships, from the Chinese *Chen Yuen* of 1882 to the USS *Missouri*.



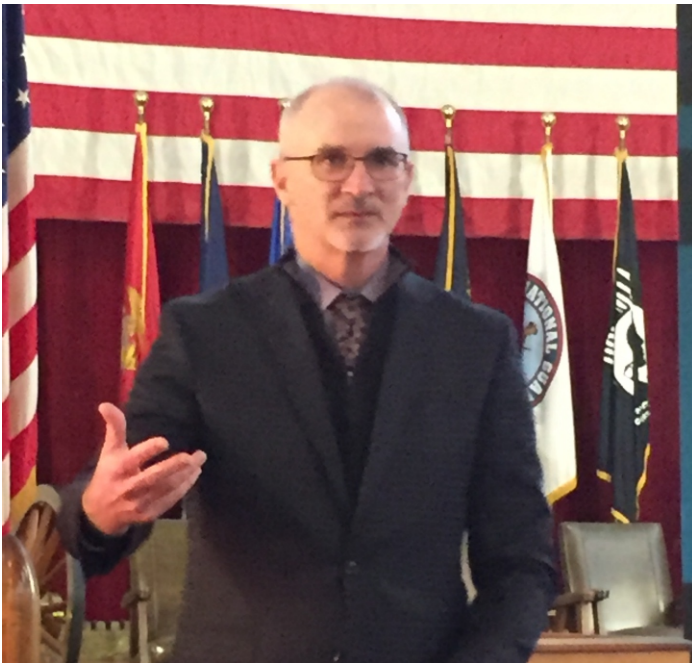


## Join the WNHA

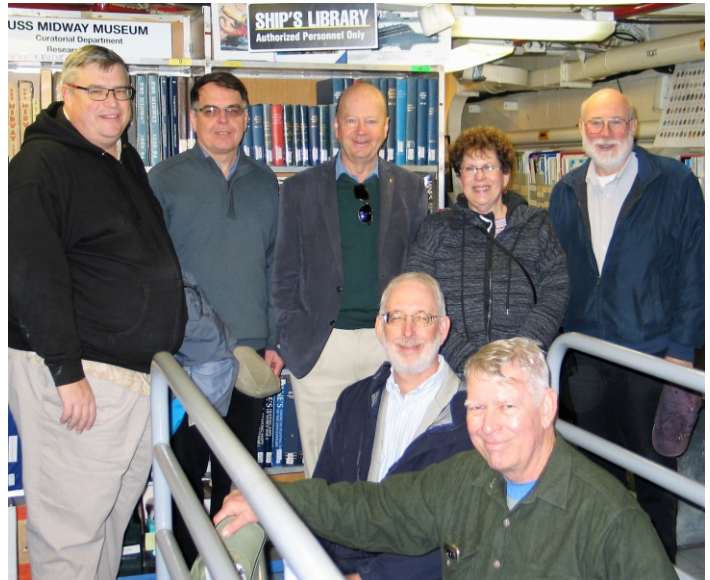
**The Western Naval History Association** (WNHA) is a nonprofit membership organization open to all individuals with an interest in naval history through academic or professional affiliation, publications, interests in ship modeling, naval war gaming, or association with family or veterans, or through personal interest.

### Benefits of membership

- ☞ Attendance at the annual symposiums. This is a two-day event and includes lunch on the first day, and free or reduced admission to local maritime attractions such as the San Diego Maritime Museum.
- ☞ Newsletter.
- ☞ Regular meetings.
- ☞ Access to member resources.
- ☞ Networking opportunities.



*Trent Hone, Naval Institute Press 2019 author of the year, speaking at the WNHA 2019 Symposium. Other award winning authors attending the 2019 event included James Goldrick, Bernard Cole, Sam Tangredi, Craig Symonds, Tom Cutler, and Vincent P. O'Hara*



*Touring the USS Midway library, after the 2019 Symposium. Left to right, Karl Zingheim, Sam Tangredi, James Goldrick, Len Heinz, Meg Heinz, Vince O'Hara, Steve McLaughlin.*

## Contact us

Write to [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net) for more information about the Association. Check out our web page at [wnha.net](http://wnha.net)

We're interested in members who are interested in naval history. That is the only qualification! We're interested in helping would-be authors or game designers. Students are welcome.

### Board of Directors

Vincent P. O'Hara, Chula Vista, CA - President

Sam J. Tangredi, Captain USN retired,  
Coronado, CA - Vice President

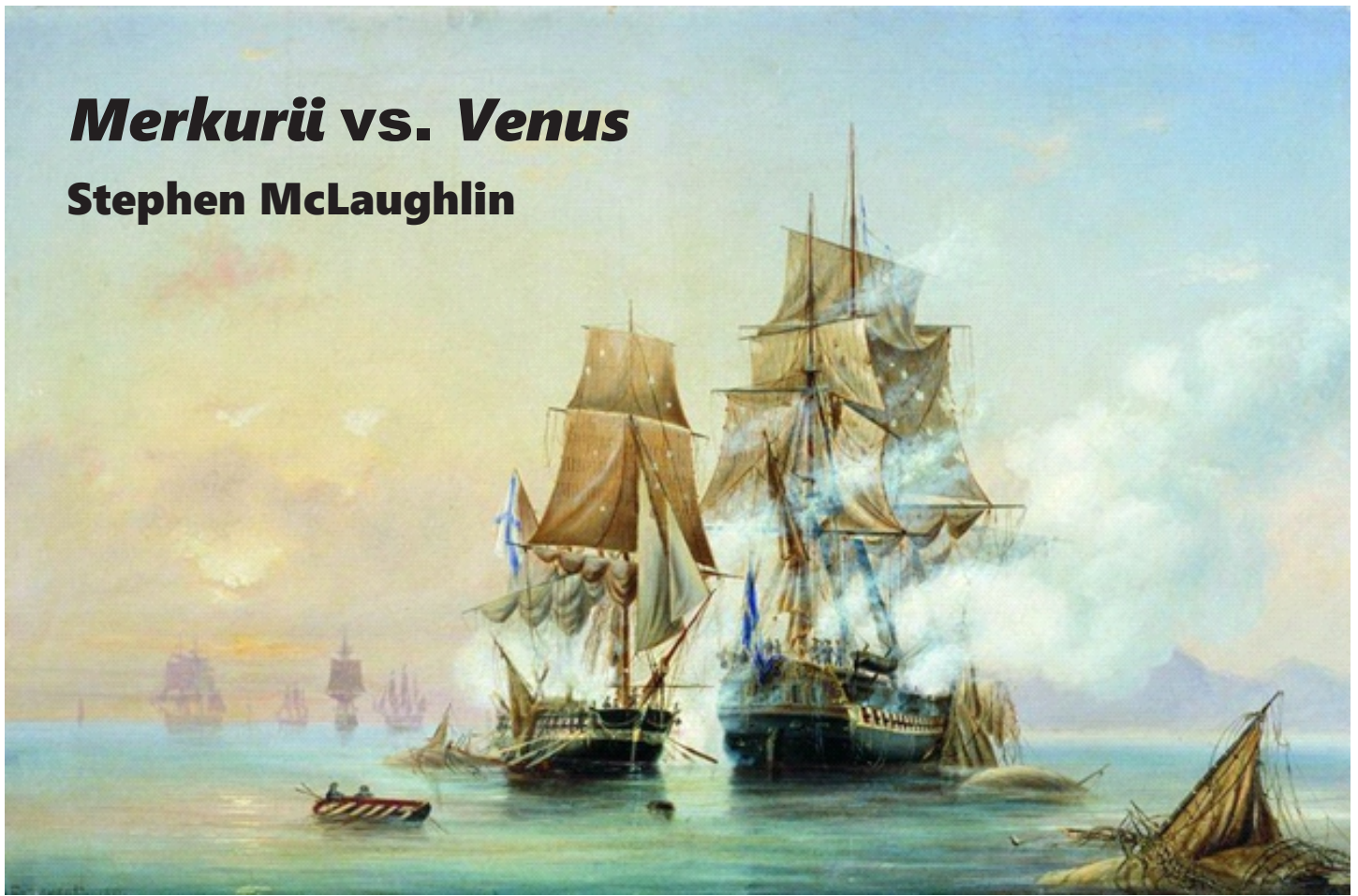
Stephen McLaughlin - Richmond CA, Secretary,  
Treasurer

William Heard, Captain USNR retired. San  
Diego, CA

Karl Zingheim, Lieutenant USN retired - San  
Diego, CA

# ***Merkurii* vs. *Venus***

**Stephen McLaughlin**



*Swedish frigate Venus captured by Russian cutter Merkurii on 1 June 1789. Painting by Alexey Bogolyubov.*

The action between the Swedish 40-gun frigate *Venus* and the Russian brig *Merkurii* is not well known in the west, but it was one of the few brilliant single-ship actions of the Russian imperial navy in the age of sail. *Venus* had entered service in April 1789; she was a fine ship, a “heavy” frigate armed with twenty-six 24pdrs on her gun deck and fourteen 6pdrs on her forecastle and poop. Her commander was Major Magnus Hannson. On 30 May 1789 she was cruising in the Kattegat off Marstrand when a Russian squadron under the command of Commodore P.I. Lezhnev sighted her.<sup>(1)</sup> The encounter was no accident; the Russians were acting on a report from a merchantman that there was a large Swedish frigate off Skagen.

The chase was on: *Venus* headed roughly NNW pursued by Lezhnev's two ships of the line (a 74 and a 66), two frigates and the brig *Merkurii*. The latter was commanded by an expatriate Scot, Robert MacGreger, who took the

name Roman Vasilevich Kroun (Crown in most English accounts) when he had joined the Russian navy the year before, one of several British officers who joined Catherine the Great's navy at this time. He had been a lieutenant in the British Royal Navy, and was given the same rank in the Russian navy, but within a few months had been promoted to captain-lieutenant. His ship, the *Merkurii*, was British-built, and had been purchased about the same time Kroun had joined the Russian navy; originally armed with twenty-two 12pdrs, she had recently been rearmed with the same number of 24pdr carronades.

The pursuit came to an end on the morning of 1 June when *Venus* slipped up Christiana Fjord (now Oslofjord), in what was then the Danish territory of Norway. Due to British and Prussian pressure, Denmark was a neutral, but Sweden was her ancient enemy, and so Russian ships (including Lezhnev's squadron) were allowed to use Copenhagen as a base. *Venus*



managed to get about four miles up the fjord, with Lezhnev's ships close behind when the wind died.

Hannson, apparently believing himself safe in neutral waters, did little to prepare his ship for action; although he later claimed to have rigged a spring so that he could turn his ship despite the lack of wind, the course of the subsequent action belies this claim. Lezhnev ordered Kroun to advance on *Venus* using his sweeps and to damage her masts and rigging to keep her immobilized in case the wind came up. According to Russian accounts, Kroun disguised his ship as a merchantman, setting her sails sloppily and covering her gunports with black canvas, and this may account for the fact that *Merkurii* was able to row up close under *Venus*'s stern without the Swedish ship taking any action to stop her. Once there, Kroun carried out his orders, shooting up *Venus*'s rigging, eventually bringing down her foretopmast while causing virtually no damage to her hull. He kept his smaller ship off the frigate's quarters, where *Venus* could bring only a few 6pdrs to bear on her opponent.

After about an hour and a half the wind began to come up, and the rest of Lezhnev's ships started to approach. At this point Hannson recognized that further resistance was pointless and struck his flag. Despite the close ranges of the action and its duration, casualties were light—*Merkurii* suffered four men killed and six wounded, while *Venus* had only one man killed and a few wounded. (2) The Russians took 302 Swedish prisoners. Hannson went aboard the Russian flagship to register his protest at this violation of neutrality, but the Russians ignored it; the Danes seem to have done the same thing when the Swedish ambassador lodged a complaint in Copenhagen. This was by no means a unique event in naval warfare, and in fact there was even a term for it—the “hot chase” or “hot pursuit.” This has been defined in the following terms: “a flying enemy may be followed into neutral waters and destroyed there if the chase began in international waters.” (3) The British admiral Edward Boscawen had offered this justification after the Battle of Lagos in 1759, when he pursued four French ships into neutral Portuguese waters, where all were

either captured or destroyed. However, the “hot chase” was not recognized under international law, and it isn't known if the Russians ever bothered to offer it in their defense. Catherine the Great simply commented, “The victors are not judged.”

Hannson was eventually court-martialed for the loss of his ship to an inferior opponent, but received a light sentence—the loss of half a year's pay. Kroun was awarded the order of St. George, 4th class, promoted, and given the repaired *Venus* to command. His wife Martha, who had been aboard *Merkurii* during the action and had tended to the wounded, was also awarded a medal. Kroun went on to play an outstanding role at the Battle of Vyborg (3 July 1790), and eventually rose to the rank of full admiral, finally passing away in 1841 after a long and successful career in the Russian navy.

#### Notes:

1. Lezhnev's rank was “Captain of Major General Rank,” roughly equivalent to commodore.
2. The Wikipedia article on the action says that a “Commander Jenkins of the cutter *Merkuriy*” wrote a letter to Hanson in which he claimed that “his ship suffered severe damages and would have been sunk if the larger ships had not come to his assistance.” But this claim is not confirmed by Russian sources, and I can find no evidence of a Russian naval officer named Jenkins.
3. Peter Kemp (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Ships & the Sea* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.400.

This account is based chiefly on G.A. Grebenshchikova, *Fregat “Venus” v Russko-shvedskoi i napoleonovskikh voynakh* (St. Petersburg: Ostrov, 2015), pp. 82-83 and R.C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Baltic 1522-1850* (originally published 1910; reprint edition: London: Francis Edwards Ltd., 1969), pp. 252-53. Several other Russian sources provided additional details.